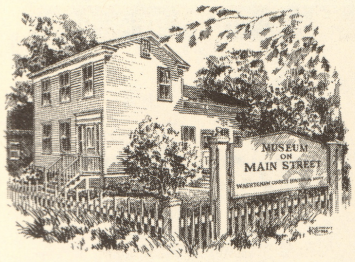
NOVEMBER 2008



IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857

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The Washtenaw County Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Information
Published Seven Times A Year
From September-May.

Museum On Main Street
500 N. Main Street at Beakes Street
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Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

Phone: 734.662.9092
Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net
Web Site:
www.washtenawhistory.org

Annual dues: January-December individual, $15; couple/family $25; student or senior (60+) $10; senior couple $19; business/association $50; patron $100.

RICHARD L. GALANT, PhD

President's Letter

Patty Creal and trellis

We are pleased to report that the trellis pictured is dedicated to Patty Creal who was the Society's treasurer for more than 15 years and continues to be active in our Society as a member of the Board of Directors and chair of the Building and Grounds Committee. A 'Firecracker' clematis vine has been planted that will climb upon the trellis to brighten that corner of the Museum on Main Street's garden.

In regard to the note in my October 2008 letter, Jan Tripp, our webmaster, has created a site on **www.WashtenawHistory.org** with the individuals numbered so that our members and friends can view the wide-angle image on the Internet and help identify those persons that attended the Museum's Grand Opening in May 1999.

On page 7 of this issue you will find some of the people have already been identified. Please sign onto our Web site and help us remember the names of persons you recognize. Also, let us know if we have misidentified anyone: 734-662-9092 or wchs-500@ameritech.net.

Since our next newsletter will not be published until February 2009, I want to take this opportunity to wish all our members and friends a joyous holiday and hope for Peace in 2009.

Winter Exhibition

From Saturday, December 13 through Sunday, January 25, 2009 the Washtenaw County Historical Society will exhibit **TRAINS to TOYLAND** with the assistance of the Ann Arbor Model Railroad Club. On the weekends, members of the club will be present to demonstrate and talk about model trains. As a special treat, Firefly the clown, will be at the Museum on Main Street doing magic on Sunday, December 14.

Featured along with the model trains will be toys from our collection. Do come and visit and remember your own childhood.

Firefly the Clown

JOHN RUSSELL

The Fox Gravel Pit: *Ancient Botany & Geology*

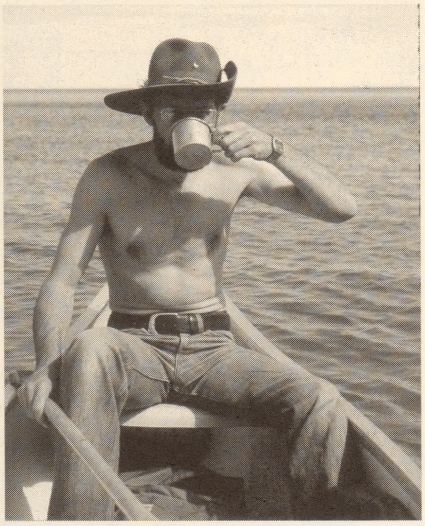
On Sunday, October 19, 2008 about 45 members and guests of the Society, gathered at the Washtenaw County Resource Center Library which is a part of the Washtenaw County Service Center at the corner of Washtenaw Avenue and Hogback Road.

A former gravel pit is not most people's image of a natural feature to be protected. But this is not just any gravel pit. Long recognized locally as a prime location to study ancient geology and botany, the Scio Township site contains numerous glacier-transported boulders, layers of rock with fossils and a mix of plant life giving insight into the Ice Age.

The pit and adjacent land - a total of 49 acres - have been purchased by the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Program, along with Scio Township and the Ann Arbor Green Belt. The county Parks and Recreation Commission, which holds title to the land, paid half the $771,000 purchase price. Scio Township and the Green Belt each paid one quarter of the cost.

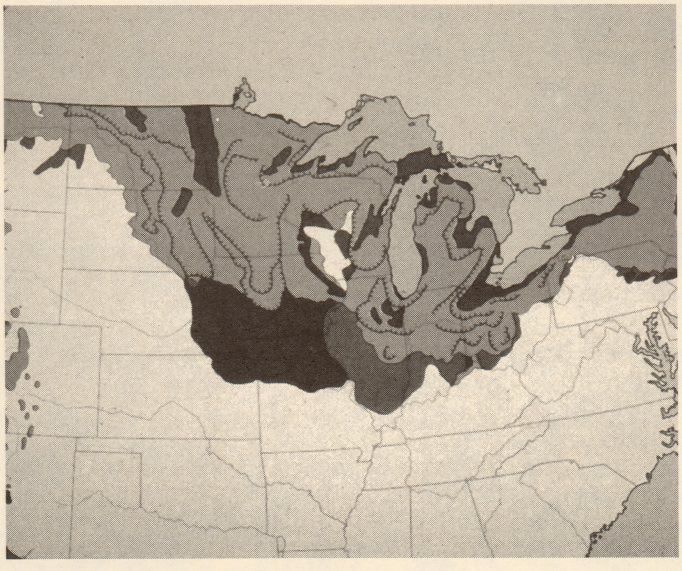
The site, located off Peters Road, will be called the Fox Science Preserve, after the couple who previously owned the land. "It portrays a really nice possibility of what the entire Ann Arbor area might have looked like 12,000 years ago," said John Russell, a retired Ann Arbor Public Schools science teacher and member of the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee, which recommended buying the land.

Over the years, Russell has taken thousands of students on field trips to the pit. He says the former gravel pit provides a unique opportunity to study geology and botany, especially how plant succession evolved after the most recent glacier receded about 12,000 years ago.



Some of the striking features that remain are our Great Lakes, beaches, gravel deposits, waterfalls, hills and valleys, and inland lakes. John Russell drinks water from one of the lakes.

This lakeshore shows sand and gravel deposits, with the characteristic ripple marks left by winds off the water.



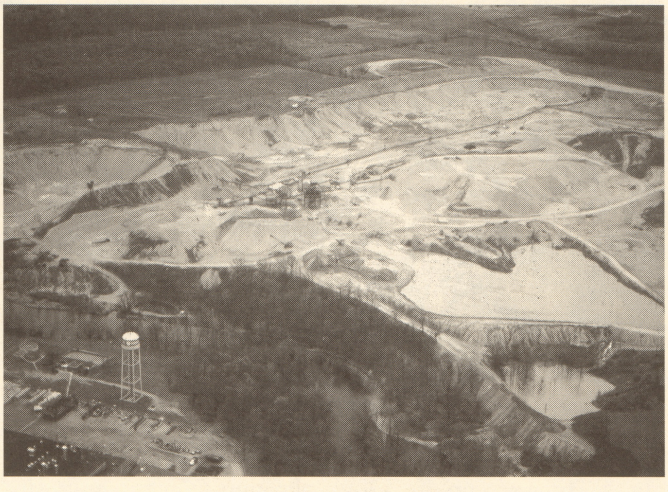
Glacial ice advanced over the Ann Arbor area at least four times, each time leaving features that remain to this day. Glaciologists can identify and trace these features back to time of their formation.

The watershed of the Huron River, outlined in black, shows a large area to the northwest of Ann Arbor, of hills and valleys that today provide mostly recreation and agriculture. To the southeast, the river channel is narrow and adds little volume on its way to Lake Erie which lies today in the basin of Glacial Lake Maumee.

The Fox Gravel Pit, off Peters Road near Zeeb Road and Huron River Drive, shown in this 1970 aerial, was created from outwash left by rushing glacial meltwater. Many such deposits dot the Washtenaw County landscape.

The Huron River is an old glacial stream that may have looked like this 14,000 years ago.

Ice moved into the Lake Michigan Basin, Saginaw Bay, and the Erie Basin. Ice in our immediate area approached from the southeast, forming the Fort Wayne Moraine and the Defiance Moraine, between which the downtown of Ann Arbor lies on outwash deposits.



Today the pit has begun to be colonized by plants which are specialists in deriving nutrients from very sterile soils, the same type of soils that remained after the glacial ice melted away. Thus the Fox Pit today simulates the post-glacial environment.

Cutaway views of the pit walls show alternating strata of cross-bedded sands, gravels, and cobblestones. These layers are identical to those we can see today on our glacial lake shores.

"Desert Pavement" on the pit bottom today resembles the cobblestone beaches of lakeshores long past. They are colonized by nitrogen-fixing algae *Nostoc,* and other plants specializing in the colonization of these nitrogen-poor soils.

This huge boulder was brought to this location by the ice sheet. Boulders like this are called "erratics" as they show up randomly in areas that have been glaciated. The material in the boulder is "Gowganda Tillite" a metamorphic form of glacial till from the Earth's first glaciation 2.3 billion years ago.

Cobblestone "pavement" is sparsely covered by algae, mosses, and grasses.

This little upright Juniper, whose berry-like cone was probably carried to this spot in the intestine of a bird, is another pioneer species beginning the vegetation of the area.

About seven species of Goldenrod are found in this pit, making it a very colorful area in the fall.

A micrograph of the blue-green *Nostoc* shows what inhabits the pit bottom. This alga lives in flat thallus-like colonies in habitats such as this. It also grows in water in spherical floating colonies. It is able to fix nitrogen into a form usable by other organisms.

Little Bluestem grass seeds are blown about by the wind which explains why this species is able to colonize sterile and remote areas like this. Several species of Bluestem are found in the Fox Pit. Other prairie grasses are also here, along with other forbs (flowering plants) often found in prairies.

Eventually we predict that beech and maple may colonize this area, but this will take a very long time, for soil will first have to be created by centuries of weathering and enrichment, since the parent material is so sterile and nitrogen-poor. One of the exciting aspects of this pit is our ability to demonstrate primary plant succession here. It is one of the very few places where ecologists can see this process of community development.

John Russell brought a collection of rocks from the Fox Gravel Pit and spoke at length about the project. Those present were very interested in the display and interacted at length.

Upcoming Events

COBBLESTONE FARM

2781 Packard Road, Ann Arbor 48108 • (734) 994-2928

COUNTRY CHRISTMAS at COBBLESTONE FARM MUSEUM
Sunday, December 7, Noon – 4 PM
$1.50 kids, $3 adults, $7 family.

Celebrate Yuletide at this historic home with music and holiday baking.

Live dulcimer music with the Village Strings

Cooking on wood stove / Animals in the barnyard
Commemorate Pearl Harbor Day with a 1940's Christmas exhibit.

KEMPF HOUSE MUSEUM

312 S. Division St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 • (734) 994-4898
www.KempfHouse.Museum.org
KempfHouseMuseum@gmail.com

Parking is available in the large library lot just south of the House

Admission is free. Donations are appreciated.

Saturday and Sunday, December 6-7, and 13-14, with house tours, 1-4 pm.

A German Family Christmas will be celebrated at the Kempf House Museum. This restored 19th century Greek Revival home will be decked out with a traditional tree and decorations reflecting a German-American family's celebration of the holidays in the early 1900s. Christmas cookies will be served.

DEXTER AREA MUSEUM

3443 Inverness, Dexter

Saturday, December 6 • 9 AM to 3 PM
The Dexter Area Historical Guild presents their
Annual Holiday Bazaar

Friday December 12 • 7 PM
Annual Christmas Sing on at the Dexter Area Museum.

SALINE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Contact: Agnes: 734-944-0442 or 734-769-2219
eMail: SalineHistory@verizon.net
Web: www.SalineHistory.org

CHRISTMAS on the FARM
Rentschler Farm Museum, 1265 E. Michigan Ave., Saline, MI

Saturday & Sunday
December 13 & 14, 2008
Saturday: Noon – 5 PM
Sunday: 1 – 4 PM.

See how farm families coped at Christmastime, when they were faced with a tight money situation during all the years of the Depression. Our 12-room farmhouse will be decorated with natural things that might have been found on the farm. A live tree will grace the parlor with genuine 1930's ornaments and lights. Simple window decorations, good aromas throughout the house, and pleasing sights and sounds will greet visitors as they enter the front door.

The dining room table will display German-American foods, all made with farm products. Spinning and quilting will be demonstrated.

The **Rentschler Farm Puzzle** is still available for purchase at $12 each. This beautiful 500-piece puzzle, featuring a collage of farm event photographs, was published by the society in 2007. See a picture of the puzzle on our web site.Light refreshments will be served in the gift shop, where Saline-related books and videos can also be found.

Thank You!

to *The Ann Arbor News* for donating seven months' worth of paper for our newsletter.

1999 Grand Opening Picture

Those already identified:
Can you name more?

1 Carolyn Smith
2 Dean Smith
3 Andrew Haines
4 Peggy Haines
6 Katie Gerdenich
7 Michael Gerdenich
15 Judy Calhoun
16 Joe O'Neal
17 Margaret Koykka Cowan
19 Patty Creal
21 Trudy Bulkley
23 John Hilton
24 Mary Lirones
25 Nancy Major
26 Esther Warzynski
33 Lois Foyle
36 Ray Detter
44 Lars Bjorn
49 Cliff Sheldon
52 Judy Chrisman
55 Ann Edwards
59 Ted Ligibel
61 Elizabeth Bishop
64 Marilyn Mason Brown
65 Anne Reuter
68 Patricia Levenick
69 Doug Kelley
70 Richard Levenick
79 Terry Brinkman
80 Nancy Bishop
82 Angela DelVecchio
83 Rosemarion Blake
84 Ronald Bishop
87 Patricia Thompson
88 Terri Bartholomew
95 Beverly Chethik
97 George Sexton
98 Don Riddering
99 Mary Sexton

FROM AN *ANN ARBOR NEWS* ARTICLE DATED 1968

"RememberWhen?"

"The Ann Arbor Historical Commission has recommended the city purchase the Town House Hotel site at 301-303 E. Ann St. for possible use as a historical square. In a letter to City Council, the commission said the property 'does not seem to have any special historical significance in itself [not true!] but said it is in an historically significant area being a part of Ann Arbor's first fine residential district.'

Herbert H. Bartlett, commission chairman, said the site was once the home of the socially prominent George Danforth family but that the building has been remodeled to such an extent that the original structure is obliterated. He said the area involved will eventually be developed into a civic center, mall or park area and all the property fronting on it will become especially valuable as sites or important public or private buildings. He said the commission believes 'any property in this area which is, or becomes, available for purchase by the city at a reasonable price, should be acquired at once."

You can see a photograph of Danforth's house in Susan Wineberg's book Lost Ann Arbor, page 92 {The book is for sale in our gift shop]. The hotel was never purchased by the city and was demolished in June 1971 after it partially collapsed. The site has been a parking lot ever since

George Danforth House

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET
A Museum Of County Life

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

TRAINS to TOYLAND
December 13 – January 25
Sunday, December 14: FIREFLY *the Magic Clown*
Hours: Noon–4 PM / Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday
and by appointment / groups welcomed

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Ann Arbor, MI
Permit No. 96

SUNDAY • 2 PM • FEBRUARY 15, 2009

WCHS GENERAL MEETING

ARCHEOLOGY OF 1015 WALL STREET & LOWER TOWN

UNIV OF MICH EXHIBIT MUSEUM
1109 GEDDES AT CORNER OF N. UNIV AV
ANN ARBOR, MI 48104

INFORMATION • 734.662.9092
www.WashtenawHistory.org

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310 HALLE LIBRARY - EMU
YPSILANTI MI 48197-2207

Make Note - Dates to Remember

2008-2009 General Meeting Schedule • 2:00 PM

Sun. Nov. 16 **A History of the University of Michigan Medical School**
Dr. David Bloom / Ann Arbor District Library, 343 S Fifth Av, 48104

Sun. Feb. 15 **Archeology of 1015 Wall Street & Lower Town**
Dr. Henry Wright / Exhibit Museum, 1109 Geddes Av, 48109

Sun. Mar. 15 **Transportation History Collection**
Kathleen Dow / Special Collections Library, 7th Floor Hatcher, 48109

Sun. Apr. 19 **The Toledo War.** *Don Faber / McKune Memorial Library, 221 S Main, Chelsea, 48118*

May 2009 **Annual Meeting:** *date and venue to be announced*

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Washtenaw County Historical Society is to foster interest in and to elucidate the history of Washtenaw County from the time of the original inhabitants to the present. Its mission shall be to carry out the mandate as stated through the preservation and presentation of artifacts and information by exhibit, assembly, and publication. And to teach, especially our youth, the facts, value and the uses of Washtenaw County history through exhibits in museums and classrooms, classes, tours to historical places, and other educational activities.